

THE

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AN ILLUSTRATED JOURNAL

OF

LITERATURE AND ART.



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SHAKESPEARE'S METHOD OF WORK: AND  
SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MAN  
AS INFERRED FROM HIS WRITINGS.

NOTES OF AN ADDRESS.

By GEORGE MILNER.

I.

TO select Shakespeare as the subject of an address is to lay oneself open to a charge of audacity. "What more," it may be asked, "can be said about Shakespeare?" There is some justification for putting such a question. The immense body of literature which his works have called forth may be now spoken of as consisting, not of volumes only, but of libraries. Not only have scholars with patient industry devoted their lives to the elucidation of his work, but thinkers of the highest rank, like Coleridge; and critics of large experience and delicate apprehension, like Charles Lamb and William Hazlitt (not to speak of the immense labours of the German critics), have turned upon him the searchlight of acute intellect. All this is true, but there is one great fact on the other side. It is this—Shakespeare is practically inexhaustible; and more, he is now, after ages of criticism, and by the process of slow but sure appreciation, acknowledged to be supreme.

The proof of greatness in a writer is to be found, more than in anything else, in the perennial power to suggest thought. This is, in fact, the final test. The Bible and Shakespeare are the two books which satisfy this test more fully than any others. It is easy

to write sermons on passages in the Bible. It is also easy to write prelections on Shakespeare, because the material in each case is loaded with suggestiveness. With either of these two volumes before us we can never be expected to make bricks without straw. I often ask myself what is the reason for Shakespeare's grandly satisfying quality and the answer is this—we naturally receive pleasure by coming in contact with life—life in all its forms. A writer is great and satisfying just in proportion to the fulness of his presentation of life. In the case of a poet or maker, whether he use prose or verse as his medium, we get, in addition to the pleasure of contact with life, the pleasure of artistic perfection—the sense of proportion and of beauty.

But Shakespeare is not only inexhaustible as a mine of thought, he is also, as a poet, supreme.

When we think of that memorable birth on the 23rd of April, 1564, and of the lowly hamlet by the Avon where it occurred, and of all the commonplace circumstances by which he was surrounded, it is natural that we should have a feeling of amazement at the marvellous working and development of his genius. We see no sufficient cause, we discover no adequate connection between the beginning and the end, between the seed sown, and the illimitable harvest which was gathered. But it is ever so—as with the Spirit so with genius, “we cannot tell whence it cometh.” To use the words of Oliver Wendell Holmes,

The nurse of poets feeds her winged brood  
By common firesides on familiar food;  
In a lone hamlet, by a narrow stream,  
Where bovine rustics used to doze and dream,  
She filled young William's fiery fancy full,  
While old John Shakespeare talked of beeves and wool.

In whatever way, however, it may have come about, of this, at any rate, we are sure, that he had a mental experience which in its universality has never been paralleled; that he had an imagination which was larger than in any other man of whom we have knowledge; and, further, that he had at his command a vocabulary of English which was of such extent, delicacy and strength that it was able to give the most adequate expression to those experiences and to those imaginations, remarkable as they were in their character and in their diversity.

## II.

It has always seemed to me that no subject can have a greater attractiveness for the student of literature than that of Shakespeare's method of working. To search for this secret is surely a pursuit of the most fascinating kind. Nor is it an entirely barren quest. Nothing which concerns a mind so unique in its power and in its grasp can be valueless or unimportant.

Before proceeding further I must ask you to consider for a short time what is the true meaning of the word imagination, because unless we have clear and definite ideas on this subject, we can never understand Shakespeare's method. He was of imagination all compact. Shakespeare and Imagination are two obvious correlatives, interdependent and mutually explanatory. To understand Shakespeare we must know what Imagination really means. To grasp the real nature of imagination we must study Shakespeare. It seems to be sometimes thought that he accomplished his work without knowing exactly why or how he did it. That is not so. It is quite true that he appears not unfrequently to have had what is called a demonic power—a power outside himself, lifting him above himself (every

real poet has that), but all the while he knew how and why he did these things. Nothing surprises you more, in the study of his works, than the proof which they give of how consummate an *artist* he was, of how thoroughly he had mastered the canons of art. I have a firm conviction that he could have told us exactly how his most far-reaching effects were produced. Let me cite a passage—one among many—from “Much Ado About Nothing” which goes to prove this:—

So will it fare with Claudio:

When he shall hear she died upon his words,  
The idea of her life shall sweetly creep  
Into his *study of imagination*;  
And every lovely organ of her life  
Shall come apparell'd in more precious habit,  
More moving-delicate, and full of life,  
Into the eye and prospect of his soul,  
Than when she lived indeed.\*

Note every word of this extract. When Shakespeare thus describes how the idea of Hero should creep into the imagination of Claudio he is telling us, in fact, how all his characters were dealt with by his own imagination. It is the *idea* of her life which enters into his imaginative study—a *whole* idea, a synthesis, not an analysis. The parts are there—every lovely organ—but they are apparelled in a more precious habit, they are more moving, more delicate, and above all more *full of life* than they ever were in actual existence. This is so with all Shakespeare's characters.

What then, I ask now, is the Imagination? The word is used so loosely, and in so many senses, and with such

\*“Much Ado About Nothing,” Act IV. Sc. 1.

overlapping confusion, that it is no wonder our ideas with regard to it should often be of the vaguest character. Many a student of literature, I should suppose, must have sought in vain for a distinct and cohesive definition. At the root of much error on this subject there lies the way in which we use the words "real" and "unreal." We make the "real," in common phrase, to be the antithesis of the "ideal." It is no such thing. We make the "unreal" to be synonymous with what we are pleased to call the "imaginative." It is no such thing. To say that a thing is "merely imaginative" is our way of condemning it. The true antithesis is this—the ideal and the material. Unreality has no necessary connection with either. The material is real; the ideal is certainly not less so.

And now, let us ask: what is it to exercise the imagination? For clearness' sake the answer had better be given by successive statements. It is, of course, first and primarily, to *make an image in the mind*. But it is more than this—it is to *embody in a harmonious whole the mind's fragmentary conceptions*. Further, it is to *create out of simple elements a new existence, which, when created, shall be essentially real and true*. And, yet further still—it is to *do all this with emotion, and with the conscious purpose of giving pleasure—æsthetic pleasure arising from a sense of beauty*. The imagination, therefore, takes what has been accumulated; and then selects, rejects, controls, arranges, harmonises; and, finally, creates. Although the power of the imagination is seen as much in what it refuses as in what it accepts, its domain is one of synthesis rather than analysis. Its action, it may be added, is intimately connected with that of sympathy. The imaginative artist has the power of going out of himself, both emotionally and intellectually;

and this is probably the reason why works of the highest art are seldom produced except under conditions which afford sympathy towards the artist; that which he gives he asks for in return.

One of the finest symbols of the imaginative process, as I understand it, is given us (where we should not expect to find it) in the Mosaic story of the Creation:—"And God said, let us make man in our *image*, after our likeness. . . . And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." Here is the express work of the imagination. The Supreme is set before us as a *maker*—the ancient name given to the poet. Something is made, and it is made in an image. The image is that of the Maker himself—exactly the process of art. The thing made is out of the dust of the earth. This represents to us the humble material—nature, which is the true basis of the artist's work. Finally, the Maker's own breath of life is needed before we can have a living soul—precisely what occurs in art; it is the artist's own life, and that only which can ever make his work to live. The magnificent eulogy which Shakespeare pronounced upon that first creation is pretty much what we have to say over the greatest works of art: "What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god."

Such, I believe, is the Imagination when rightly defined. When a work of art, be it poem or painting, fails, it is because the artist has lacked this faculty, and consequently has been unable to see at one time both the individual and the general—unable to keep his mind grasping the whole while he laboured upon a

part. It will be seen, therefore, that in our judgment the imagination is not merely, as is often supposed, an idle or vagrant function of the mind, fluttering aimlessly from thought to thought, or dealing only with fantastic unrealities; but rather that it is, on the contrary, a function which, equally with that of the man of science, loves before all things—fitness, order, harmony. Now all this would illustrate and receive illustration from any great play of the master's.

How then, let us now enquire, did Shakespeare approach his task? Well then, first of all, I believe he invariably started from the concrete, never from the ideal. He passed immediately into the ideal, but he began with a nucleus of fact—that was an idiosyncrasy with him, that was part of his method. And, observe, all the greatest works of genius have been accomplished upon that line. He did not, as inferior artists have done, take, for instance, abstract virtues or vices and make them into characters. He did not even take ideal personages and clothe them, so to speak, in flesh; he took usually real persons and idealised them. I say usually because there are some notable exceptions, but they are few, and only such as prove the rule. He never cared to make his own plots, but the moment a suggestion touched his mind from the outside, then his great imagination, with all its plastic power, began to work upon it and to develop it in all directions by a process as natural and as unforced as that by which, in the natural world, the simplest germ expands into a life which is even awful in its complexity and in its possibilities. Having once begun, the work, I hold, was, with him, easy. Without difficulty he invented accessories and created new characters, putting in points of subtlety and the profoundest moral considerations where no such things existed before, until he ended in the creation of

a noble and enduring monument of his own genius. It is his greatest praise that, taking dead things from the hands of other men, he made them *live* in such a way that now they live for ever. Who can doubt that the historical creations of Shakespeare are not only more alive to us than are their originals in the pages of the historian, but are also for us more vital than were their embodied counterparts among the men with whom they lived in their own day.

Let us now, in illustration of this theory, take the play of "Macbeth," so far as space permits. And, let me add, any of the great plays would serve the same purpose. We may assume that Shakespeare based his tragedy upon Holinshed's "Historie of Macbeth." After reading "Holinshed" he would allow the facts of the narrative to sink into his mind. He would then seize upon the central idea, the inevitable pivot. Ulrici has the same thought. He says: "Shakespeare always places an idea in the centre of the whole."

This was the conception of a soul, not without noble qualities—courage, endurance, skill—passing on by dreadful stages to its ruin through the lust of power. Then comes the conception of the wife. She also had noble qualities—filial affection, sincere love of her husband and entire devotion to him, but the same vice ruins her. Next, and really dominating the whole, comes the supernatural element—temptation, from spiritual influences outside the mind, to the performance of evil which was already *in the mind itself*. These points being arrived at, his imagination proceeds to its proper work. It harmonises, eliminates, heightens. Things in "Holinshed" which do not fall into the scheme, drop out. On the other hand, things not in "Holinshed," but essential to harmony, are inserted. He then puts the



supernatural in the forefront, by means of the short first scene (that of the three witches), to prepare the mind for what is coming, and to make, so to speak, an atmosphere for the play. The effect of this scene is remarkable when one considers its brevity and its roughness of execution. It fills the mind with images of terror. I may say here in parenthesis that the earlier part of "Macbeth" appears to me to be of inferior workmanship. I think Shakespeare at first tried to work on the lines of an older and vastly inferior play. But soon, his imagination being fired, he passes into a higher region; and, as is always the case with him, the versification becomes more perfect, and the language more forcible as the situation heightens. Having got fairly to work the characters now live and act before him, as it were, automatically. He sees them all outside himself; they fulfil their destiny, even if their creator should will otherwise. Of course there is no epic quality. It is all purely dramatic. The story evolves naturally through the speeches of the characters. The slightest words, and especially the "asides," are all-important. In the second interview with the witches a passing expression of Banquo's shows that Macbeth had already planned the murder of Duncan, or thought of it. In Shakespeare's hands the supernatural only works with the actual. Note the terrible passage in Act I., Scene 5, beginning:

Come, you spirits  
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,  
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full  
Of direst cruelty!

Surely no words so terrible were ever put into the mouth of a woman. The imaginative faculty makes them as true as if the poet had heard the words and reported them. This is the triumph of his method of work.

Now take Scene 1, Act II. The faculty of reason, arranging the plan, decides that the scene shall be in the Courtyard. That Banquo and Fleance shall come in. Then pure imagination does all the rest, producing the dark night, the moon gone down (a setting moon or a moon just set and making darkness as of eclipse always appeals to the imagination), the two flaring torches—one held by Fleance, the other by Macbeth's servant, who meets them—and all the dialogue which accompanies. The magnificent speech at the close of the same scene is Shakespeare all over, and is just on the confines of his one besetting fault (if one may venture to say it), his tendency towards bombast. Probably he would have excused himself on the ground of the demand made by the audiences of the time for strong situations and declamatory speeches.

In Scene 2 of the same act occur the fine lines, spoken by Lady Macbeth:—

I have drugged their possets,  
That death and nature do contend about them,  
Whether they live or die.

When the imagination is thoroughly heated it speaks in figures like these. It does not so much coin metaphors as use language whose phrases are themselves metaphors. This is the finest effect which poetry can ever produce. In the words which quickly follow:—

Had he not resembled  
My father as he slept, I had done't,  
—My husband!

Lady Macbeth's saving grace of filial love and marital affection are both shown. Another fine specimen of imaginative work is afforded by the little colloquy between

Macbeth and his wife in which guilty apprehension sharpens the hearing.

Observe here, as all through the play, Shakespeare is continually filling the mind with images of terror—lamentings heard in the air, strange screams of death, terrible prophecies, confused events, the clamouring of the obscure bird, and the like.

And this is made the prelude to Macduff's heartrending cry of threefold horror.

O horror, horror, horror! Tongue, nor heart  
Cannot conceive nor name thee!

I must not pursue the play further, but I must ask you to note that incomparable scene in the last Act, where Lady Macbeth walks in her sleep. I do not think Shakespeare's power of imagination and its distinctive character are anywhere more clearly shown than in this awful colloquy.

Note also Macbeth's speech in the last Act, beginning—"She should have died hereafter," and ending with the characterisation of life as:

A tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

This is how Shakespeare enforced the moral consideration—this is part of his method. The man who takes this view of life is the man who has succumbed before a vile temptation and who looks upon the ruin of his wicked and inordinate ambition. In this way he teaches us, not didactically but through the imagination, that only by self-control and righteous dealing shall a man bring himself peace at the last.

## III.

I turn now to the consideration of the second part of my subject and ask how far may the characteristics of the man be legitimately inferred from a careful and sympathetic study of his writings?—how far, that is, can plays and poems both, help us to form an idea of what Shakespeare himself was? I am aware, of course, that the question is a thorny and contentious one. Strong opinions have been expressed on either side, and these may easily be pushed too far. Mr. George Brandes may be taken as prominent among those who would answer in the affirmative, while Mr. Sidney Lee may be regarded as the most extreme of modern advocates in the opposite camp. In such a matter much depends upon the method of the critic. If he is prosaic, literal, academic, he will take sides with Mr. Lee. If he has himself some imaginative power—without which no work of imagination can be satisfactorily considered—he will probably lean toward the conclusions of Mr. Brandes. For myself I freely admit that there are obstacles and pitfalls to be encountered from whichever side the subject is approached. To walk warily and circumspectly is the wisest course. The enquiry can only be a tentative one, and should be conducted with modesty and reserve. I must also add that it is, of course, impossible within the limits of this paper to do more than indicate the lines upon which an exhaustive enquiry might proceed.

Before entering upon details and special instances, let us look at the subject as a whole. Is the personality of any writer ever entirely separated from that which he writes? I think not. It is against nature to suppose that such can be the case. Granted imaginative sympathy and some share of intellectual penetration and you can track the man down and find him behind whatever veils and

disguises, dramatic or other, the writer may seem to hide himself. In every great poet—and assuredly in Shakespeare—there exists in a condition of more than usual vitality and self-assertion what has been called the “primary personality,” and this will make itself felt. There may be an extraordinary power of intellectual detachment, but the individual man is still there, and even out of “abysmal depths” the personality will arise and give something of its own colour and form even to that which may seem most foreign to itself. Those who are the extreme advocates of what may be called the impersonality and intangibility of Shakespeare the man in relation to his writings, go so far as to contend that the outward circumstances of his life—good and ill-fortune, losses, gains, bereavements, disappointments, left no impress upon his plays. Mr. Sidney Lee would have us believe that the change of tone so clearly observable in the various stages of his production had no connection with the events of his life. Does this commend itself to any man’s sound judgment? Is it not more reasonable to believe that Mr. Furnivall and Professor Dowden, for instance, are nearer the truth when they connect his choice of subject and his method of treatment with the various periods of his life—the time of sunny and sweet comedy, of boisterous comedy, of darkening comedy, of the tragedy of reflection and passion, of ingratitude and false love, ironical and bitter; and, finally, of re-union, reconciliation, forgiveness, rest, and calm, and quiet meditation. For all this change in the character of his plays—a change quite unmistakable—Mr. Sidney Lee will admit no reason beyond that of his having passed the age of forty; but in making even this admission he gives away his case, for if Shakespeare was so purely and phenomenally impersonal, the advance of years should have made no difference in his views of life,

One word more about Mr. Sydney Lee and those who think with him. Such critics appear to hold that by admitting the influence upon Shakespeare of exterior circumstances, or of mental changes, we depreciate the greatness of his objective and dramatic work, and so "underestimate and misapprehend the resistless might of his creative genius." On the contrary I hold that the theory of absolute detachment reduces Shakespeare to a kind of impossible mental phenomenon, a sort of abnormal automaton of genius. The real proof of his "resistless might" lies in the marvellous power to use the personal equation in such a way that it should only appear to have been lost—not really lost—in the intense power of dramatic realisation, and of self-identification with the various characters of his plays.

#### IV.

Having now endeavoured to show that there was a real connection between the general tenour of his outward life and the gradual development of his genius, apart from the ordinary and inevitable changes which are brought about by the mere advance in years, I will take one or two instances of special circumstances in his life which clearly find an echo in the dramas. It is well known that for a time there was a fierce contention among actors and playwrights as to the employment of children as actors, to the disadvantage of men. Ben Jonson supported the introduction of children, and although Shakespeare, with his usual urbanity appears to have held himself aloof from the quarrel, there can be little doubt that he had his own views on the subject, and that he took occasion to set forth those views in "Hamlet." The passage occurs in Act. III., Scene 2, where Rosencrantz and Hamlet in a bantering fashion discuss the question. The passage is

too well known to need quotation. It is sufficient to say that it is evidently intended to throw ridicule upon the practice of employing children on the stage. In the same scene Hamlet, speaking to the players, is obviously satirising the current criticisms made by the contemporary dramatists on each other's works. One further instance, of a different kind, may be adduced. I was reminded of it some time ago by a passage in a judicious and on the whole favourable review of George Brandes' book by Dr. Ward. The reviewer says:—"To my mind Dr. Brandes is quite justified in tracing a connection between the death of Shakespeare's mother, which occurred in the latter part of 1608, and the tribute to maternal influence in 'Coriolanus,' which we are practically agreed in dating 1610, or rather earlier." These instances are given as samples only of the way in which events connected with the life of the man are woven into the texture of the so-called impersonal dramas.

Enough has now been said, perhaps, to show that Mr. Sidney Lee is not justified in his contention that "no direct or definite connection can be discerned between the progressive stages of his work and the progressive stages of his life," and that Dr. Brandes was nearer the truth when he said that "Shakespeare was not thirty-six plays and a few poems jumbled together . . . but a man who felt and thought, rejoiced and suffered, brooded, dreamed, and created," and that, as Dr. Ward admits, "a true Shakespearean biography brings home to us the undeniable truth that, given the possession of such a body of writings as is left to us from Shakespeare's hand, 'it is entirely our own fault if we know nothing whatever about him.'"

Before passing to the consideration of the way in which by careful examination of his writings we may discover not only allusions to his external life, but also clear

indications of his character, his temper, and his bent of mind. Let me quote some pregnant words from Emerson : "Shakespeare is the only biographer of Shakespeare, yet with Shakespeare for biographer, instead of Aubrey and Rowe, we have really the information which is material, that which describes character and fortune, that which, if we were about to meet this man, would most import us to know." And how is this to be done? I answer chiefly by relying upon what I venture to call the Recurrent Idea. By watching for the continued repetition of certain ideas, of allusion to certain aspects of nature and of the mind of man, you discover what were the things which had most insistently forced themselves upon him, which had left their impress in such a way that they were continually recurring—in short, you reach the peculiarities, the idiosyncracies of the poet's own mind. In applying this test certain conditions must, of course, be observed. First, the ideas must not be isolated but really recurrent; second, they must be such as are not absolutely demanded by the dramatic situation; or, third, appropriate only in the mouth of the character who speaks them. It is mere puerility, for instance, to argue that you cannot track the man himself because at one time he praises excess and at another temperance. What would be the result if in the ordinary criticism of great writers we were to show no more discrimination than this?

I can only take a few instances as illustrating what I mean and what is my mode of procedure. Shakespeare, for instance, is not a poet of the sea in the same sense that Mr. Swinburne is—a man rejoicing in the sea and all its aspects—but he had observed the sea, and there was one characteristic of it which I think had struck him more than any other—this was the idea of wave following wave in illimitable profusion—the washing of waves of which



there was no end. This has received its culminating form in the well-known passage in "Macbeth," where it is said that the great sea with all its interminable and endless washing could not take that one spot from the little hand.

Again, in "Henry IV.,"

God of this great vast, rebuke these surges,  
Which wash both heaven and hell.

The same idea occurs in "Much Ado About Nothing":

She is fallen  
Into a pit of ink! that the wide sea  
Hath drops too few to wash her clean again.

Then there is the grand line in "Henry V.":

Swill'd with the wild and wasteful ocean.

Now all these passages and many others which might be cited, give Shakespeare's feeling with regard to the sea. It was that of one who was inland-born, and who was probably impressed, at first sight, with the wild, wasteful washing and illimitable character of the ocean.

In the same way it would be possible to determine which other particular aspects of nature had most attraction and charm for him. It is impossible, for instance, to miss his fondness for wild flowers. He knew them all, and had learned to love them with an intimate love, doubtless when a boy wandering in the meadows by the Avon.

Coleridge says truly that "Shakespeare's fondness for children is everywhere shown." It is seen in the conversation between Lady Macduff and her child in the 4th Act of "Macbeth."

His very frequent references to Mercy would lead us to conclude that that quality had deeply impressed his mind.

The recurrent idea will be found not only in the well-known passages in the "Merchant of Venice," but more than once in "Measure for Measure," in "Titus Andronicus," and elsewhere. In harmony with this obvious love of mercy, comes the characteristic of gentleness. If we did not know that he was gentle, and that among his contemporaries he was "Gentle Will," we might certainly have gathered it from his writings. In "Henry VIII." we have:

"You bear a gentle mind,  
And heavenly blessings follow such creatures."

And in "As You Like It":

"Your gentleness  
More than your force moves us to gentleness."

The delineation of the true gentleman and of fine courtesy follows upon the love of gentleness, and is very frequent in the plays. Take one instance from "Much Ado About Nothing," where Leonato says: "Never came trouble to my house in the likeness of your grace; for trouble being gone, comfort should remain; but when you depart from me sorrow abides, and happiness takes his leave."

In "As You Like It," there are some words relating to Orlando, which seem to describe Shakespeare himself. Steevens, in a copy of the Fourth Folio, marked this passage as descriptive of Shakespeare:

He's gentle, never schooled and yet learned, full of noble device, of all sorts enchantingly beloved, and indeed so much in the heart of the world, and especially of my own people, who best know him, that I am altogether misprised (despised).

If I may venture to infer one of his mental character-

istics I should do it in connection with his vocabulary. If any one doubts its extraordinary capaciousness let him re-read "Hamlet." There when he needs but one word a score seem waiting for his choice. On the intellectual side nothing delighted him so much as the keen analysis of character and the subsequent imaginative presentation of it. After that his pleasure was in "brave words"—"words, words, words." Being sure of the possession of ideas and the wit to handle them he gave the reins to his predilection for presenting them with the most prodigal garniture of words.

There are some curious passages which, I think, indicate peculiar delicacy of organisation and physical sensibility, such as is usual in the poetical temperament.

Having indicated the lines on which investigation might proceed, I will only mention certain other points which come out most clearly—A love of music; a keen appreciation of the healing nature of sleep, probably arising from a difficulty in obtaining it; the possession of a tender conscience. And this leads me to add one further word on an important point.

I think that Shakespeare's mind was essentially reverent. Many passages might be adduced in proof of this, but one must suffice—the very lovely speech put into the mouth of Marcellus in "Hamlet," in which he speaks of that season—

Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated.

Concluding with the words:—

So hallowed and so gracious is the time.

And this instance, I may observe, complies with the requirement of my test. There is absolutely no dramatic reason for putting this speech in the mouth of a soldier like Marcellus.

Although Shakespeare was pre-eminently the poet of the world and of "this present life," the *recurrent idea* shows plainly enough that he had been profoundly affected by the mysteries of life and death. I think he was himself a believer in revelation; it has been suggested, indeed, that he clung to the Old Religion. At the same time, there is evidence that the sceptical tendencies which were perceptible enough in some of his contemporaries, had touched him also, and it is not without reason that "Hamlet" has been placed among the great sceptical dramas of the world. To a certain extent the same quality may be discerned in "Macbeth." Whatever were his religious views, however, one thing is certain, he had a deep moral sense, and a thoroughly healthy way of looking at the difficult problems which arise in connection with the arrangement of human conduct. If anyone doubts this let him look at the 129th sonnet. No more massive work in fourteen lines exists in the language. Every word tells as with the swing of a hammer. Compression of meaning and terseness of phrase are carried to their extremest limit. It is a sonnet of which Englishmen may well be proud. We have been sometimes stigmatised as a nation of hypocrites; but so long as Shakespeare stands at the head of Englishmen, speaking out manfully and honestly as he does in this sonnet, the charge may be scornfully repelled. Lest I should be supposed to exaggerate I will remind you that Dante Rossetti said: "None of Shakespeare's sonnets is more indispensable than the one on Lust."

I used to think that Shakespeare was the poet of the present world, and in that kind pre-eminent, but still of the earth earthy; but as I study him now I am ever discovering unsuspected depths of moral and even spiritual insight. It would be a treason to humanity

if no religious basis could be found in the heart and mind of Shakespeare. Much discussion has been raised as to the particular form of faith to which the poet adhered. For that I care very little. He might have clung to the Old Religion or have been a member of the Reformed Church, or even, as some have held, a Puritan; but what I do care for is this—that he lived a serious and noble life, scorning no man's convictions, and having in him, at least, nothing of the blasphemous or mocking spirit. Sometimes it is urged that it does not matter what kind of personality Shakespeare was, nor even whether it was he who wrote the plays or not. "You have the plays," it is said, "and what more do you want?" I confess to being one of those to whom it does matter. I wish to retain my belief in the man as I have conceived him, and to identify him with his work to the fullest degree. When I ask myself what kind of man this was who gave to future generations this marvellous heritage? My answer is—he was a man of wonderfully healthy nature; imaginative in the highest degree, yet sane and practical; clear, sweet, gentle and generous in his nature; a poet among poets; a dramatist, an actor, and a man of business; a boon companion among his intimates, and yet possessed of the mightiest brain which human being ever felt himself possessed of, with that grand spirit which went down to the very lowest depths of being, and which yet could soar to the highest. That is the sort of Shakespeare which I realise, and I refuse to have him divorced from his poems and his plays.





## SIR JOHN SUCKLING.

By the REV. ARTHUR W. FOX.

A YOUNG man of good birth and handsome person, endowed with a ready wit and a vein of graceful song, whose conscience is not over squeamish and whose taste for gambling and carousal is conspicuous even for those wasteful days, is eminently calculated to make a courtier. Such a man was Sir John Suckling, who shot like a meteor across the court of Charles I. For its length his life is of unusual interest: so many wild freaks, so many curious events were crowded into his thirty-two years, as would have seemed to be almost impossible. His poetry appears to have been chiefly occasional, almost indeed accidental; none of it was published till after his death. Manuscript sheets well-thumbed and dog's-eared were passed round from hand to hand, while the bard himself was alternately sneered at by the envious and admired by his friends. Yet some of his verses are immortal, as will be seen in due course; whilst some though dainty in form, are marked by that indefinable coarseness which characterises a man of loose notions of morality. They are not so much coarse with the coarseness of their time as with an individual coarseness, which is peculiar to their author. It must ever astonish the admirers of Charles I., when they find how immoral the court of so rigid a moralist actually was. Suckling was one of this court, neither better nor worse than many

of its disreputable members, but endowed with a finer intellect than most of his compeers in profusion and prodigality.

Born at Whitton, near Twickenham, in February, 1609, he was the son of Sir John Suckling, of the Board of Green Cloth, by Martha, daughter of Thomas and niece of Lionel Cranfield, Earl of Middlesex. Though he had the reputation of "being a dull fellow," his father ran Weston close for the Chancellorship of Great Britain, since dulness and high office are by no means contradictory terms. The younger Suckling is said to have begun his education at Westminster, from which great school he proceeded in 1625 to Trinity College in Cambridge, where, like many another clever but volatile youth, he gained no degree. On February 23rd, 1627, he was entered at Gray's Inn, where and in London outside the Inn he made such friends as Sir Tobie Matthew, Tom Carew and that sweet poet but dastardly debauchee, Richard Lovelace, the loyal-hearted cavalier and faithful lover, Jack Bond, the noseless Sir William Davenant, who would fain have passed for the natural son of Shakespeare, the noble Lord Falkland and the holy and learned John Hales. His legal studies were so little to his taste that in 1628 he set out on his travels to Italy by way of Paris, from which he brought back nothing more than a smattering of the language and an added grace to his carriage and his manner. Always restless, he was found among his old associates in England by the autumn of 1630, while during the next year he served under the Marquis of Hamilton in the army of Gustavus Adolphus. In the course of this campaign he is said to have helped to defeat Tilly at Leipzig on September 7th, 1631. If the latter accounts of his courage be true, his part in this battle would have been a small one enough.

Next year he returned to his old haunts in London and to the court, where, according to reliable testimony, he was equally devoted to pretty girls, cards, dice and bowls. Moreover, his poetry shows that he was by no means indifferent to the charms of good wine. It is always interesting to know what the men of a bygone day were like. Aubrey says of Suckling, "He was of the middle stature and slight strength, brisque round eie, reddish fac't and red nose (ill liver), his head not very big, his hayre a kind of sand colour; his beard turned-up naturally, so that he had a brisk and graceful looke." During the following eight or nine years he lived chiefly at court in alternate state and beggary. He was a confirmed gamester in many forms; he was the best or one of the best bowlers of his day, and he was so deeply devoted to cards that he practised many games of them in bed. He is further said to have invented the game of Cribbage, for which succeeding generations owe him much gratitude. It is at least certain that he gambled so heavily that his sisters upon one occasion are said to have come to him at the Peccadillo Bowling Green "crying for fear he should loose all their portions." If this story of Aubrey's is true, Suckling would seem to have been less gallant to his own than to the sisters of others. When he had suffered from a run of bad luck, so that his fortunes were at a very low ebb, he "would make himselfe most glorious in apparrell, and sayd that it exalted his spirits, and that he had best luck when he was most gallant and his spirits were the highest."

Herein we get a true picture of the man. At one moment he would be penning a sparkling song or a witty letter to one of his lady-loves, at another he would be gambling for the highest stakes at one of his favourite games of chance or skill, the next he would find no shopkeeper ready



to trust him for so small a sum as sixpence for a single day, the next he would be making some midnight assignation or taking his part in some merry carousal with his friends. That he had a serious side to his character is seen from the fact that he took many books with him to Bath and there composed an interesting and able "Tract on Socinianism." Moreover, he was present at the famous discussion held at the house of John Hales, at Eton, where Shakespeare was preferred to the classical poets. One of his favourite haunts was the Bear Tavern near the Bridge-foot, where he read his songs to many listeners and met his cronies. He found time to visit the noted inland watering-places of Tunbridge Wells, where he had the skill and good fortune to win £2,000 from Lord Dunhill at the homely game of ninepins. Such extravagance and such alternations of good and bad fortune were ill calculated to keep him in long possession of his inheritance. A time comes when borrowing grows more expensive and less possible, and Suckling was compelled to seek some surer means than gambling of retrieving his lavish expenditure.

He hit upon the commonplace method of marriage for money, and in 1634 he wooed the daughter of Sir Hugh Willoughby, whose large inheritance he felt would be of great use to him. The lady seems to have entertained no proper appreciation of his attentions. So little did she care for her handsome admirer, that she begged another suitor, Sir John Digby, to rid her of her importunate wooer. The latter was a gallant after a lady's heart, "being a proper person of great strength and courage answerable, and yielded to be the best swordsman of his time." Suckling foolishly gave his rival the long-desired opportunity by attacking him with two or three friends. Whereupon Digby, who was attended only by his lackey,

flew upon his slightly-built opponent "like a tiger," cudgelled him soundly, and made him run for his life. This unfortunate incident put an untimely end to Suckling's wooing and seriously damaged his reputation at court. Indeed fame has small respect to those who prefer life to dying for the sake of honour. He seems in the end to have outlived his disgrace, and to have always been favoured by the Queen, who was notoriously more partial to showy grace than to ungainly worth.

However that may have been, his amusing "Session of the Poets" was handed about in manuscript in the year 1637. In this ingenious satire the poets are represented as being brought before Apollo, in order that he might settle who should be laureate. Amongst many unknown names Ben Jonson looms large according to his wont and loudly claims the wreath, but has to sit down without obtaining his desire. Tom Carew's claim is sifted, and his Muse is declared to be too "hard bound" for the office. Suckling himself is summoned,

"but did not appear,  
But straight one whispered Apollo i' th' ear,  
That of all men living he cared not for't,  
He loved not the Muses so well as his sport;

"And priz'd black eyes, or a lucky hit  
At bowls above the trophies of wit;  
But Apollo was angry, and publicly said,  
'Twere fit that a fine were set upon's head."

Finally, to teach the poets true modesty, Apollo crowned an alderman, who

"openly declared, that the best sign  
Of a good store of wit's a good store of coin."

There can be no doubt that Suckling describes himself exactly in the stanzas quoted. The whole of the poem is

a pleasant satire after the style of Horace, but which gives the impression of having been dashed off in the heat of the moment of inspiration and left to take its chance without correction.

Next year Suckling had his play "Aglaura" presented in the Private House in Blackfriars. When this astonishing tragedy was amended and produced after the Restoration, Samuel Pepys went to see it and called it a "mean play." In the present instance his judgment is correct; "Aglaura" is certainly a tragedy, since it contains six deaths of various kinds, though none of them natural, some behind the scenes, some before the eyes of the spectators. Some of the stage-directions are curious; twice the actors are instructed to "scratch their heads," whether for need or for ideas the sage playwright does not betray. During the next two years he seems to have produced several other plays, such as "The Discontented Colonel," "The Goblins"—a not very witty comedy,—"The Tragedy of Brennorault," and "The Sad One." None of these is truly interesting in itself, really dramatic, or shows any aptitude for the writing of blank verse. Suckling was in essence a lyric poet and a song-writer: his Muse was not solid enough to compass the dignity of tragedy, while though a considerable wit, his humour was too sporadic to be adapted to the production of comedy.

Leaving the distractions of the stage Suckling joined his friend Goring, whose character was sufficient to damn the cause of an angel, in an attempt to serve the King. The two friends promised each to raise a company of one hundred men for the expedition against Scotland. Our poet gave loose to his taste for splendour in the equipment of his troop, which is said to have cost him £10,000, so lavish was their uniform. Aubrey thus speaks of them as "a troop of 100 very handsome proper young men, whom

he clad in white doublets and scarlet breeches, and scarlet coates, hattes and feathers, well horsed and armed. They say 'twas one of the finest sights in those dayes." So fine a sight was this company, that its uniform was greeted with derision and savagely lampooned, while both it and its leader were said to have made a somewhat inglorious charge against the Scots. Even if this piece of scandal be true, it may be remarked at this place that the poet and his popinjays were not the only company in the English army which made a charge of that kind in that ill-fated war.

Suckling's career was now drawing to a close. In 1641, perceiving that the King's cause would be irretrievably lost if the present policy of inaction were pursued, in company with Jermyn, he devised a plan for bringing up the army to overawe the Parliament. For some reason or other matters were delayed probably by the King's irresolution, till the wild scheme leaked out and came to the knowledge of the two Houses. As a natural consequence so fierce a storm of indignation burst upon its unlucky author's head, that he was forced to flee to France. Of his death there is some uncertainty. It seems probable that Aubrey is right in asserting that he took poison. The sad story had best be quoted in the old antiquary's own words, which run thus: "Anno 1641 he went to France, where, after some time being come to the bottome of his fund that was left, reflecting on the miserable and despicable condition he should be reduced to, having nothing left to maintaine him, he (having a convenience for that purpose, lyeing at an apothecarie's house in Paris) tooke poyson, which killed him miserably with vomiting. He was buried in the Protestants' churchyard." Aubrey's date of 1646 has been corrected, but the rest of his story seems probable enough. Charles, like his faithless race, was seldom mind-

ful of absent friends, and the young poet's ruinous extravagance had reduced him to the depths of poverty. Such gay spirits not uncommonly sink soonest under the weight of misfortune. They have never learned to deny themselves a single pleasure and they would scorn to work. Suckling had not the constancy to fight against his poverty, and he ended his life thus miserably at the early age of thirty-two. Had he been strong enough to have acted up to the level of his real gifts, he might have achieved greater fame and more lasting success.

Suckling was oddly compounded: there can be no doubt that he had a serious religious side to his nature, which showed itself at times. As has been said, his "Account of Religion by Reason" was intended to meet the arguments of the Socinians. When he was preparing it, he went to Bath with a coach-load of books to aid him in his studies. No doubt, too, a course of the waters would be beneficial to him after the lavish vigour of his life in London. The little pamphlet is dedicated to the Earl of Dorset with the full-mouthed compliments which marked those fulsome times. The whole work has the appearance of having been rapidly thrown together. It is distinguished by quick wit and occasional touches of nice discernment, which prove how fine a scholar he might have been had he not disdained the needful drudgery. Still it is not convincing, though it is clear that its author was in serious earnest when he wrote it. His prose style is in the main lucid and his words well chosen. But he was not able to carry through a long argument; he preferred quick thrusts to persistent assault, with the result that he charms rather than convinces. Moreover, he is often trembling on the edge of deep thoughts without daring to plunge into their depths. Hence it will be needful to say no more of this interesting little work than this, that it shows the

religious side of his nature, which could not be gleaned either from his letters or from his poems.

Another side of his temper reveals itself in his letters, of which some in full and some in fragments are preserved. In some cases it is no longer possible to say to whom they were written, but it seems clear that with the exception of those written to one or other of his numerous flames they were intended to be shown to more than the recipient. His own futile attempt at matrimony had soured him against the holy estate, so in his endeavour to dissuade his friend, Jack Bond, from love, he remarks, "Marrying, as our friend the late Ambassador hath wittily observed, would certainly cure it; but that is a kind of live pigeons laid to the soles of the feet, a last remedy, worse than the disease." From his other letters it is quite evident that Suckling would have recommended without hesitation something short of matrimony to cure love. He is a strange mixture of chivalry and licentiousness seasoned with occasional pinches of the spice of a noble nature. An example of one of his complimentary letters to one of his divinities may be given for the instruction of sighing shepherds. It runs thus:—"Dear Princess,—If parting be a sin (as sure it is) what then to part from you? If to extenuate an ill be to increase it, what then now to excuse it by a letter? That which we allege to lessen it, with you perchance has added to the guilt already, which is our sudden leaving you. Abruptness is an eloquence in parting, when spinning out of time is but the weaving of new sorrow. And thus we thought; yet not being able to distinguish of our own acts, the fear we may have sinned farther than we think of, has made us send to you to know whether it is mortal or not." It must be confessed that the foregoing letter has more of the appearance of an exercise in cleverness than of a real outpouring of the

heart. The same criticism may be made of most of his letters in this kind. More need not be quoted from these: but it may be remarked in passing that they give a considerable insight into his life and into the gay lives of the court gallants during the days of the First Charles.

It is, however, as a poet that Suckling has won his chief, if not his only, title to fame, and that title rests firmly on the slender yet sure foundation of quite a few poems. Of those which he has written perhaps not more than three are made up of the stuff of immortality; but these three are sure of their place in the garland of English song. Our poet was a skilful inventor of metres, a fact for which he does not always win due credit, perhaps because of the want of success of some of his inventions. He does not seem to have realised the need of taking pains to polish his experiments in this kind. Some of his songs were sung to the lute, some perhaps to the spinet, when the music might assist in the slurring over of doubtful syllables and of other little roughnesses in the rhythm. But some of his new measures ring with the true chime of song. Such, for example, as this stanza portraying an inconstant lover:—

If where a gentle bee hath fallen  
 And laboured to his power,  
 A new succeeds not to that flower,  
 But passes by;  
 'Tis to be thought, the gallant elsewhere loads his thigh.

or this of an honest lover:—

If fondly thou dost not mistake,  
 And all defects for graces take,  
 Persuad'st thyself that jests are broken,  
 When she hath little or nothing spoken:  
 Know this,  
 Thou lov'st amiss,  
 And to love true,  
 Thou must begin again, and love anew.

In these two examples, which might be multiplied with ease, it will be seen that Suckling has the independence and metrical creativeness of the Elizabethans, who immediately preceded him. But it must be confessed that he leaned rather to the meretriciousness of Beaumont and Fletcher than to the severe grace of Ben Jonson's lyrics, or to the marvellous witchery of Shakespeare. Furthermore, he had a coarse fibre in his nature which does not give a favourable impression of his purity of heart. Nor is the coarseness like that of Herrick upon occasion, palpably introduced to tickle the palate of the groundlings, but it would seem to be part of the poet's being. It is not sensuousness, it is the offspring of bad taste. That such coarseness was lightly tolerated by so rigid a moralist as Charles may appear surprising. But a careful study of the poets who haunted the court of "the white King" is quite sufficient to open the eyes of his fondest admirers.

Of this gay court with its solemn head Suckling was one, neither better nor worse than his neighbours. A spend-thrift, a gambler, a wit, a poet, an occasional theologian, a hard drinker, a man of loose life, whose courage was not beyond reproach and whose cleverness none could dispute, he flitted about like a gay butterfly as far as his costume and outer man were concerned, and like a tame bulfinch carefully trained to sing court measures with occasional memories of the sweeter songs of the wild wood. Most of his poems are songs of passion. As his wayward fancy was caught he broke out into snatches of musical verse, which was handed about the court in manuscript, perhaps set to music, sung, admired, envied, scorned according to the temper of those who read it. There is always a blending of wit with his passion, which indeed tends to weaken its force sometimes: nor could any bard declaim with greater force against the obdurate fair one. Witness his proud advice to a despairing lover:—



Why so pale and wan, fond lover?  
 Prithee why so pale?  
 Will, when looking well can't move her,  
 Looking ill prevail?  
 Prithee why so pale?

Why so dull and mute, young sinner?  
 Prithee why so mute?  
 Will, when speaking well can't win her,  
 Saying nothing do't?  
 Prithee why so mute?

Quit, quit for shame, this will not move,  
 This cannot take her;  
 If of herself she will not love,  
 Nothing can make her—  
 The devil take her.

In spite of the carelessness of the second and fifth lines of the last stanza, none can doubt the force and applicability to many cases of the foregoing song. So apposite is it indeed to the disagreeable chill of rejected addresses, that the little poem seems likely to be remembered for many generations to come. The rhythm is so good and the sense so sound, that both will appeal to the half-angered, half-sad heart with no mean power, while the last line will continue to express in the future, as strongly as it has done in the past, the common charity of disappointed swains.

Another song may be quoted to illustrate Suckling's beginnings of lovemaking, which is both vigorous and in the main melodious:—

Out upon it. I have loved  
 Three whole days together;  
 And I'm like to love three more,  
 If it prove fair weather.

Time shalt moult away his wings,  
 Ere he shall discover  
 In the whole wide world again  
 Such a constant lover.

But the spite on't is, no praise  
 Is due at all to me;  
 Love with me had made no stays,  
 Had it any been but she.

Had it any been but she,  
 And that very face,  
 There had been at least ere this  
 A dozen dozen in her place.

In the foregoing stanzas the devil-may-care spirit of Suckling is sufficiently displayed. Constancy was not in his nature either to woman or in other serious pursuits; neither does he commonly seem to have had a sound appreciation of much besides the physical beauty of the maids, who appealed to his wayward heart. There is little in him of the depth of passion expressed by greater masters of song-writing. It may be that he never really loved truly, as man should love. Certainly he had no higher estimate of women than his friend, Tom Carew, and held them in far lower regard than did his friend and crony, Dick Lovelace, to whom he had addressed his exquisite descriptive poem of "The Wedding." There is scarcely a poem of his relating to women which is not tainted with this physical sensuousness, while many of them hint in plain terms at sensuality. Still within his compass he could sing with a music of his own and with considerable power.

We may now accompany him as guests to that *Wedding*,<sup>1</sup> of which he has so daintily sung. To be rated at its true worth the whole poem must be read, when the subtle touches of description, the buoyancy of the wit and the exact suitableness of the rhythm cannot fail to be

1. Hazlitt says it was the wedding of Roger Boyle, first Earl of Orrery, to Lady Margaret Howard, daughter of Theophilus, Earl of Suffolk.

perceived and admired. The bridegroom is portrayed marching along with that air of proud, yet nervous self-consciousness, which is the usual portion of his kind. But in painting the portrait of the bride, the poet uses his full selection of words, each of which seems to fit into its place, like the delicate touches of colour in a Dutch picture. Some stanzas must be quoted in spite of their familiarity to all lovers of poetry, to show that the praise is not excessive.

Her feet beneath her petticoat,  
Like little mice stole in and out,  
    As if they feared the light:  
But oh, she dances such a way,  
No sun upon an Easter-Day  
    Is half so fine a sight.

Her cheeks so rare a white was on,  
No daisy makes comparison,  
    (Who sees them is undone).  
For streaks of red were mingled there,  
Such as are on a Katherine-pear,  
    The side that's next the sun.

Her lips were red, and one was thin  
Compared to that was next her chin,  
    Some bee had stung it newly.  
But (Dick) her eyes so guard her face,  
I durst no more upon them gaze,  
    Than on the sun in July.

These three stanzas will suffice to give a taste of Suckling's quality, when he had a theme to his mind. He passes on to speak of the parson's possible envy of the bridegroom, of the cook's impatience, of the grand carouse, when

Several ways the time did pass,  
Whilst every woman wished her place,  
    And every man wished his.

The dance, the bridal chamber, the tedious posset and the conclusion are told with much wit and beauty. It were devoutly to be wished that Suckling had left us more verse of this kind, which alone is sufficient to give him his own place amongst the immortals. The descriptive power is so great, that the reader sees the whole succession of scenes of the wedding until the dance is over. The procession, the brave bridegroom, lovely bride, the church, the banquet, the dance, the posset, and the rest form a living picture from the past, which gives more insight into the life of our forefathers than many pages of what is usually called historical narrative.

Suckling's limited power of satire is seen best in his "Session of the Poets," which has already been illustrated. To what has been said before may be added these remarks. The poet's criticisms of his fellow-bards show much discrimination and are in the main kindly enough. Some of the names mentioned are almost wholly unknown to-day except as courtiers, whose verse would be handed about the court like Suckling's own, but which has long perished. Some of them no doubt met at the Bear Tavern and read their productions to the assembled guests, so long as they were tolerated. But few of them had the lasting quality of their volatile compeer, who, when he had a mind, could turn a tune against time. Venerable ghosts, they appear and disappear, as he sings his sportive song. Truly it would have been good to have been present at one of those gay carousals, over which "rare Ben Jonson" still presided in Suckling's time, while Davenant tried to disguise the absence of his nose, and Lovelace lilted forth his strenuous verse. Even Selden is credited with divine poesy, while Edmond Waller was just beginning to polish his delicate lines. To these Suckling sang, when he thought fit. Sometimes it would be a tavern-catch not unfitted to

some favoured drab, whom he fancied; sometimes it would be a more or less pointed satire; sometimes he declaimed against obdurate fair ones, and once he turned his lute to one of the daintiest pieces of descriptive writing in the language. It is this intermittent, careless character of his muse, which is so tantalising, as her occasional descents to the speech of a tavern-drab are so irritating.

What then are we to say about Suckling's poetry and what about the man himself? A careful study of his various metres will repay the student, who may find occasional lapses, but who must admit that most of his rhythms are well handled, as all of them are well imagined. It is his haste alone which prevents him from attaining more perfect melody in each. His letters give us the impression of great care in their composition; his poems, on the contrary, seem to have flowed from him with little effort. He was not sufficiently impressed with the need of care in writing verse; his chief test in this matter would seem to have been simply spontaneity. Now spontaneity, like impromptu poems, is often a synonym for slipshod work. Great poetry, like anything else which is great, requires considerable labour. The poet is no doubt "born and not made." But for all that his poetry takes a considerable amount of making and no small care, if it is to have the lasting quality. That Suckling was a born poet, no-one will venture to deny; that he might have greatly improved his verse in the making by a little more care is no less true. That he had the divine fire in his soul can easily be seen in his best work; that he sometimes sang merely to please his tavern-cronies is no less conspicuous. After all he only lived thirty-two or three years at most, many of which were spent in the camp and more still in gaming. Still it seems a pity, that he did not take his poetic gifts more seriously. When he does yield to

the full fascination of Erato the sportive Muse of love, he proves himself no contemptible worshipper on Parnassus.

Another quality militated perhaps with his universal success as a poet, and that is his wit. Quips, jests and conceits were in part the fashion of his age. Suckling was essentially of his age; that is why part of him belongs to all time. His love of witticisms does not always do justice to his undoubted sense of humour, and his jests obtrude themselves sometimes into unsuitable places. He was not commonly given to serious thought; search his poems through and you will find much sportive verse, some conceits though not a great number, some satire, but little if anything to indicate that he took a serious view of life. Even the poetical records of his passion are not to be taken too seriously. Sometimes he would seem to be smiling quietly at the damsel, whose charms he is chanting, while the sound wholeness of his heart is manifest in most of his songs. Sometimes he gives the reader the impression of suddenly looking up from a game of bowls and catching sight of some passing fair one. Instantly his fancy is caught, he sings a little song in her honour, then turns once more to his game utterly forgetful of her former presence. It is just this carelessness and light-heartedness, which give so great a fascination to his poetry, but which make it in many respects so disappointing.

He had a keen eye for rural and partly cultivated nature, which he was able to depict in suitable language. It is true that he does not often try his hand at such descriptions. But he could hear the birds sing, and see the daisies silvering the meadow; he noticed the crimson-stained cheek of the Katherine-pear and had an eye for the timid mice stealing across the floor. But after all he is a poet of human nature, who seems to have had a deep love of the great city, in which he had lived the greater part of

his life. His happiest touches, with a few noteworthy exceptions, are used to display the inconsistencies, the joys, the extravagancies and sorrows of lovers. Herein his buoyant wit served his turn well; nor must it be forgotten that his descriptions of rural nature always lead up to or are connected with some human being. After Sir John Digby had cudgelled him, the doubt on his courage thus implied hindered his advance at court. Only one of his poems is addressed to the King. Still there can be little doubt that his verses were read and sung about the court, as well as over the sack-slopped table of the Bear Tavern; nor does the Queen ever appear to have entirely lost her interest in him. So much for Suckling as a poet. He is a true poet of considerable elegance. So little of his poetry has survived probably because he wrote so little. It is after all easier to hold a hand at cribbage or to win a rubber at bowls than to pour forth a continuous stream of immortal verse. That Suckling realised this and did not weary his Muse with a too severe strain of importunity is manifest to the perceptive critic. Neither did he trick her out in a perfect dress with uniform success. Such a task would have been too laborious for a man of his type. But though he often suffered her to go draggled and slipshod, when he adorned her with her *Wedding-dress*, he showed what he could have done oftener, if he had really tried. He played his game of skill or chance, he composed his dreary plays, he sang his little song, and he passed away before his time by his own hand. Yet his seat with the immortals is assured, and he remains the sad example of a poet, who has given such a taste of his quality but in such small measure, that the lover of verse can only long for more of the best.

As to Sucklings' character there is not a great deal to be said in its favour. He did make true and lasting friend-

ships with similar choice spirits to his own, and sometimes with far nobler men like Falkland and Hales. He may have had the spendthrift's generosity; but it must still remain uncertain whether he paid the portions of his sisters. Though he cared little for the formal manners of the great Lords of his time and never associated with them of his own free will, in all his dealings with them he would seem to have been as servile as was common in that age of eulogistic extravagance. That he was a good pot-house companion goes without saying: that was a common feature of the poets of the period. Like many of his cronies, he loved a practical joke and played more than one with much success. His general manners and his witty conversation endeared him to many who did not search for deeper reasons of admiration. His letters show the terms on which he lived with his friends. Sometimes we can conceive that he broke a jest on them, which must have stung to the quick. Tom Carew, it would seem, had once made up his mind to marry a widow: Suckling, in his attempts to dissuade his friend from thus throwing himself away, referred to the luckless widow as "a kind of chewed meat," and a "half-tyred mare." Such expressions are certainly forcible and witty after their fashion; but they are not calculated to please a fond lover. Moreover, his continuous onslaughts upon women and attempts to expose their weaknesses are neither chivalrous nor just. No man, who had ever lost his heart, could have uttered such taunts.

Suckling was personally vain, as perhaps most handsome people may be said to be, though some conceal their vanity with wonderful skill. His gorgeous habit of dress, the startling bravery with which he bedecked his troop in the Scottish war, and some other lesser indications point in this direction. That he was vain of his verse does not



anywhere appear: that came to him too easily to employ his thoughts as much as it might have done with advantage. But his poems on love and his letters to women point to his conviction that he could easily conquer most of them. If a man really believes that he is the easy victor of women's hearts, he usually neither knows women nor himself. Suckling found that out when he went a-wooing not for love but for money. Mistress Willoughby was not taken in by his feigned graces and his affectations of deep passion. She saw through his pretentions and caused a former lover to beat him off literally and in sober earnest. He seems, too, to have had some opinion of his political sagacity. Almost the last event of his life in England proved alike his wisdom and unwisdom. He could clearly see, what Charles with his hesitant intellect could not see, that the royal inaction was fatal to the royal cause. But how to devise a remedy he could not decide. His plan of joining Goring in bringing up the army to the King's help was just the least satisfactory plan possible in those perilous times. He did not realise the heroic firmness and the dauntless determination of men like Pym and Hampden. He had to flee, and found to his cost when he was on the point of starving in France, that Charles was in the habit of giving up his friends to the anger of their enemies, when his own interest demanded, or of leaving them to die of neglect with a carelessness alike Stuart and royal.

So the poor, gay, young poet came to an end of his resources and so he made an end of his life. It is a pathetic story of great talents to a large extent wasted. Suckling lacked stability, without which it is impossible to succeed in making the best of natural gifts. He was loveable rather than deserving of love, brilliant rather than steady. Yet he fills a distinct niche in the temple of

fame, and remains in the history of our literature as a poet, who might have done far more than he did, of more compass than actual achievement, as a courtier who gambled away his patrimony and gave the King bad advice, as a starving bard, who laid hands on himself in his despair. Our human sympathy follows him to that now unknown grave in the Protestant cemetery of Paris, and we breathe our regrets for his untimely end and his unfulfilled promise.





## ON AN OLD VOLUME OF THE "SPECTATOR."

By JOHN MORTIMER.

CHARLES LAMB has told us of the "ragged veterans" to be found among his books, and we have it, on the authority of Crabb Robinson, that Elia's library was of the shabbiest and contained the finest collection of first-rate works in bad condition that he had ever seen. Yet I doubt whether the gentle humourist had a volume in his collection more disreputably shabby in appearance than the dingy old folio which is at present engaging my attention. In its forlorn and battered condition it would have appealed to Elia's tenderest sympathies. With such powers of retention as are left, it holds together near upon three hundred numbers of the old "Spectator," of the years 1711-12. In its original binding it may have presented a fair and goodly appearance, but in its present aspect it shows signs of severe mutilation, and the degradation consequent upon much ignoble use. One of its covers has disappeared, and the other has been flayed of any skin, of sheep or calf, with which it may have been clothed. Its leaves have an autumnal, if not a wintry, look, being brown and time-stained, with the edges of them frayed and dog-eared. A neglected and despised waif among books, it was discovered and rescued by its present owner at an angling resort on the river Wharfe, where its pages had been made serviceable by some previous possessor, a disciple of Izaak Walton it would seem, as a storehouse

for such feathers of birds—still in evidence there—as were suitable for the artificial construction of the alluring fly.

In the contemplation of this bit of literary flotsam and jetsam, a drifted remnant no doubt, from the wreck of some old library, the imagination is pleasantly stimulated, and much ingenious speculation might be indulged in regarding the adventures which may have befallen it in its passage down the stream of time. There is nothing uncommon in such an interest, which it shares with multitudes of other books of varying degrees of antiquity, that fall into one's hands, and yet, somehow, for the present writer this one has brought with it a peculiar attraction of its own.

No lover of English literature on its humourous and humanitarian side, I take it, is without an edition of the "Spectator" on his bookshelves. The one I possess was published early in the last century, in numerous volumes of a handy pocket size, and substantially bound in calf. This re-print, however, which hitherto in its degree has had that sufficient rime of age which rendered it harmonious with the essays embalmed in its pages, seems almost jejune and modern when brought into contact with this ragged old folio.

Turning over the faded leaves each one in its two pages representing the daily output, one seems to be brought into immediate touch with the time and circumstances which gave them birth. The familiar essays, presented to one here in their original dress, have a charm which is not obtainable from later guises. These are of the numbers which lay on the breakfast tables on the mornings of those remote days of Queen Anne, and were discussed by the wits in the coffee houses. The readers of Mr. Thackeray's "History of Henry Esmond" will remember how that worthy gentleman, being sorely in love with Beatrix, and

suffering much at her hands, by reason of her wilful ways, conspired with Dick Steele to produce a sham number of the "Spectator" in which that lady under the name of Jocasta, should be taught a lesson as to the possible consequences of her waywardness. This feigned "Spectator," we are told, was printed at Mr. Steele's office, exactly as those famous journals were printed, and was laid on the breakfast table of Miss Beatrix in place of the real newspaper, for Mistress Jocasta Beatrix, we learn, "who had plenty of wit, could not live without the 'Spectator' to her tea." The date of that delicate forgery is Tuesday, April 1st, 1712, and here among these numbers you may see the real one for that day which, however, is not of Steele's writing, but Budgell's.

That story of Henry Esmond runs parallel with the times when these numbers of the "Spectator" appeared, both Steele and Addison figure in it, and the author confessedly owed much to such sources of inspiration, in the reflection he gives us of the life and manners of the period. In his essay on Steele he says: "As we read those delightful volumes of the 'Tatler' and 'Spectator' the past age returns; the England of our ancestors is revived; the may-pole rises in the Strand again in London; the churches are thronged with daily worshippers; the beaux are gathering in the coffee houses; the gentry are going to the drawing-room; the ladies are thronging to the toy shops; the chairmen are jostling in the streets; the footmen are running with links before the chariot or jostling round the theatre doors." In like manner as one glances over these essays under the original conditions of their presentation, the sense of intimacy with the principal authors is intensified, and quite a new interest awakened; even the quaintness of the printed type counts for something in the general impression. The fictitious personages,

too, Sir Roger de Coverley, Will Honeycomb, Captain Sentry, and the rest of that memorable club, are endowed with an additional charm as one sees them make their appearance here for the first time on the literary stage.

It seems a far cry to the time when these essays, with the inevitable Latin quotation at the head of each, sufficed in their daily advent to meet the requirements of the town. It is not necessary to deal with their subject matter, with which we are all familiar. We know how, in the construction of them their writers blended entertainment with instruction, and how lightly and easily they passed from gay to grave, from lively to severe. Some of them form delightful bits of comedy, while others are distinctly of the nature of sermons, for both Steele and Addison were week-day preachers. Dick Steele, indeed, had early taken to sermonising, of which his "Christian Hero" is a notable example. Therein he sets forth his "Argument, proving that no principles but those of Religion are sufficient to make a great man." I have a quaint little copy of that book, which, in 1727, had passed into its eighth edition, showing that up to a period of two years before Steele's death, and twenty-six years after it was written, it still commanded the attention of readers. In Addison, as we know, the humourist and pietist were blended in fair and equal proportions. He could discourse with equal grace upon such light topics as "Ladies' Head Dresses," "Hooped Petticoats," and "The Exercise of the Fan," and upon such serious ones as "Religious Faith and Practice," "The Wisdom of Providence," and the "Immateriality of the Soul." Scattered among his week-day sermons, in the volume before me, I come upon hymns breathing the most devotional spirit, and which are still sung in our churches. Such is that which begins thus:—

When all they mercies, O my God,  
My rising soul surveys,  
Transported with the view I'm lost  
In wonder, love, and praise.

or that other one:—

How are Thy servants blest, O Lord,  
How sure is their defence,  
Eternal wisdom is their guide,  
Their help Omnipotence.

But it was not in such a serious direction that I intended to stray in dealing with these numbers, so let me go on to say that a special interest attaching to them, and which is not derivable from reprints, is to be found in the marginalia of advertisements, for which a certain space was left, variable in quantity according to the length of the essay. One recipient of them for insertion was "Charles Lillie, Perfumer at the corner of Beauford Buildings, in the Strand," a name which seems to carry with it a sweet-smelling savour. These advertisements give us certain side-lights on the manners and customs of the time, which are both instructive and entertaining. Apropos of sermons, here, on an early page, is one to this effect. "A parcel of manuscript sermons of a learned and eminent Divine, deceased (never out of the Executors' hands), to be disposed of. Enquire at Mr. L. Hunt's at the Blue Perriwig upon the paved stones in St. Martin's Lane near Charing Cross." On this page, too, we may see the price that Jocasta may have paid for her tea, which is announced as saleable at ten shillings the pound, and equal to that which is usually sold at thirteen or fourteen shillings a pound. Here, too, is this announcement: "Deserted out of the Honourable Colonel William Barrel's Company, in Her Majesty's First Regiment of Foot Guards, Jonathan Burton, 5 foot 10 inches high, aged

about 20 years, a Linen Draper by trade, his father living near Cripplegate, and Will Finch, 5 foot 8 inches high, about 28 years old, a Distiller by trade, lately living in Wood Street. Whoever secures them shall have Two Guineas reward, giving notice to Colonel Barrel at his lodgings in Whitehall, or if they will return to their company within three days they shall be kindly received." Among the missing we are informed that, "Whereas a Boy about 18 years of age, clothed like a Dutch sailor in a Blue Jacket with Ivory Buttons, Striped Waistcoat, and Trunk Britches, wears his own curled hair, a Bonnet on his Head, and speaks broad Scotch, went away from the Lord George Forbes's lodgings in Cleveland Court behind the Thatched House Tavern on Sunday last, the 2nd of March, and has not since been heard of, these are to give notice that if any Body will bring the said Boy to Lord Forbes's lodgings they shall have a Guinea Reward." There are many advertisements that one lights on relating to property lost and stolen, and often with accommodating conditions as to its restoration. Here is one which is a curiosity, "Lost on Sunday, the 11th inst., in or near St. John's Church, Hackney, two gold watch cases. If the same is brought to Daniel Delinder in Devereux Court by the Middle Temple Watchmaker without any questions asked, they shall receive 3 Guineas reward for each, or if either of them proportionable. N.B.—There is a new invention by the said Daniel Delinder of a spring which is very neatly fixed on the inside of the case which prevents the case to be either lost or stolen." Then again we meet with this: "Whereas a chequered Cloak-Bag was dropt from behind a Gentleman, between Southwark and Crouched Friars, last night about 7 o'clock, with some Linen 2 Perriwigs, and some Books and papers, &c. of no use but to owner. Whoever brings to Hamlin's Coffee



House by the Exchange shall there receive a Guinea and no questions asked."

Among public sales it is noticeable that these are often announced to take place "by the candle," or "by inch of candle," the custom, it would seem, being to insert a pin in the candle, for measurement, and to allow the bidding to go on until, in the burning, that point was reached, when the last bidder was declared the purchaser. Much wine among other beverages seems to have been sold in this way, but regarding some of the vintage of Oporto, disposed of under retail conditions, we have this significant announcement: "Brook and Hellier having discovered that several Gentlemen's Servants who have been sent to their Taverns and Cellars for neat Oporto Wine (which is 18d. per quart) have instead thereof brought the small Viana (which is but 15d. a quart), and that some who have been sent directly to the above said Tavern and Cellars have never been there but carried Home (like traitors) something else from other places for Brook and Hellier's; gentlemen are therefore desired, when they suspect themselves imposed on, to send the wine immediately to the place they ordered it from, or a note of what it was they sent for, in order to know the truth, and Brook and Hellier will pay the extraordinary charge of porters on the occasion."

For Clorinda, Celia, and others of their sex, there are many tempting announcements, among them being that of the famous "Bavarian Red Liquor which gives such a delightful blushing colour to the cheeks of those that are white and pale, but it is not to be distinguished from a natural fine complexion as not perceived to be artificial by the nearest Friend. Is nothing of paint, or in the least hurtful but good in many cases to be taken inwardly. It renders the face delightfully handsome and beautiful, is

not subject to be rubbed off like paint, therefore cannot be discovered by the nearest Friend. It is certainly the best beautifier in the world. Is sold at Mr. Payn's toy shop at the Angel and Crown in St. Paul's Churchyard near Cheapside, at 3s. 6d. a bottle, with Directions."

For these fair ones, too, is the announcement that "The Vapours among women are infallibly cured in an instant so as never to return again, by an admirable Chymical secret a few drops of which take off a fit in a moment, dispels sadness" and, as the advertisement goes on to say, works a miracle. The exercise of miraculous powers, or the affectation of such, in another direction, however, meets with an evil fate, for we read that there is "Just published the second Edition of the Tryal and the proceedings at large against Jane Wenham, of Wakorne in Hertfordshire, for Sorcery and Witchcraft, at the Assizes at Hertford, before Mr. Justice Powell, when she was found guilty and received sentence of death for the same, March 4th, 1711-12." Among remedial medicines intended for those who cannot grow fat by laughing we come upon an "Assured cure for Leanness, which proceeds from a cause that few know but easily removed by an unparalleled Specific Tincture, which fortifies the stomach, purifies the blood, takes off Fretfulness of the Mind, occasions rest and easy sleep, and as certainly disposes and causes the Body to thrive and become plump and fleshy, if no manifest distemper affects the patient as water quenches fire." To health or pleasure seekers who travel in search of either, these announcements are addressed: "A coach and six able horses will be at the One Bell in the Strand to-morrow, being Tuesday the tenth of this instant June, bound for Exon, Plymouth or Falmouth, where all persons shall be kindly used." "On Friday the third of October next, John Abrahall with a coach and able horses sets out from

the Bull Head, the lower end of Gray's Inn Lane, to bring company from the Bath. This is to give notice that any person may be carried to Bath or any other place on that road at a reasonable rate." For gentlemen whose sporting tastes are of the cock fighting kind there is this treat provided. "The first week in June will be fought a Cock match at Gisbrough in Cleavland, Yorkshire, by the Cleavland gentlemen, on one side, and Mr. Ramsden on the other for 10 Guineas the Maine. They weigh on Monday the 2nd June and begin to fight on Tuesday in the afternoon, and continue fighting the Wednesday and Thursday following."

About some of these advertisements there is an air of mystery, as thus: "A penny post letter, dated the 15th instant, and signed G. S., is come into the hands of the person to whom it was directed. If the Gentleman who wrote the said letter will, by a line of writing or otherwise, let the person to whom it was directed know where he may see him, he doubts not to give him full satisfaction as to the contents of the said letter." Something tender seems to underlie this one: "Florinda. Directions were sent as you ordered them, and the person is much concerned at the miscarriage, not knowing the reason thereof, but assures you 'tis not what you suggest, and doubts not but you will suddenly hear of them by the way you first proposed." Here you have an account of an advertisement which looks like a libel, and was posted up by someone who ran away: "Whereas an advertisement was on the 29th of September put up on Mr. Goodlad's back garden door at Mile End (concerning a lady who lodges in the same house). This is to give notice that whoever shall discover to the said Mr. Goodlad (at his house aforesaid or at the Hare in Fenchurch Street) the person who put up the said Advertisement, shall receive two guineas

reward." There are the elements of possible romance in this one, which carries with it a sweet suggestiveness: "A person in a white cloth suit, laced with silver, who handed two ladies out of the box in the gallery of the Play House in Drury Lane, on Wednesday last, is desired to come this day without fail to the Abbey Church of Westminster between 3 and 4 in the afternoon."

As this brings us to the playhouse door it may be noted here that precedence was given in these announcements to those of the theatrical kind, the house of Drury leading the way, and after this manner: "At the desire of several ladies of quality, by her Majesty's company of Comedians the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, the present Thursday, the 24th day of January, will be performed the last revived play called "The Tempest," or the Enchanted Island, as it was altered from Shakespeare by Sir Will D'Avenant and the late Mr. Dryden, Poet Laureate, with new scenes, machines, and all the original decorations proper to the play. By her Majesty's command no persons will be admitted behind the scenes." In addition to Drury we have the Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket and Punch's Theatre is the little Piazza Covent Garden. On April 21st, 1712, we are told that "This day is opened the famous Water Theatre of the late ingenious Mr. Winstanley, there is the greatest Curiosities in Water Works the like was never performed before by any. It is shown for the benefit of his widow every evening between five and six of the clock. With several new additions made this Spring, as three new stages, Sea Gods and Goddesses, Nymphs, Maremaids, and Satyrs, some of them playing of fire mingling with the water, and a Sea Triumph round the Barrel that plays so many liquors. And all is taken away after it has performed its part and the Barrel is broken in pieces before the spectators." Of

the locality of the theatre we are told that "it is at the lower end of Pickadilly, and is known by the Wind Mill on the top of it."

One of the most interesting of these playhouse notices is that which tells that at Drury Lane will be performed "A new Tragedy called 'The Distrest Mother.'" It was written by Mr. Phillips, and it is to the performance of it, as witnessed by Sir Roger de Coverley, that Addison devotes one of his most delightful papers. Says he, "My friend, Sir Roger de Coverley, when we last met at the Club, told me that he had a great mind to see the new Tragedy with me, assuring me at the same time that he had not been at a play this twenty years. The last I saw, said Sir Roger, was the Committe, which I should not have gone to neither had I not been told before hand that it was a good Church of England comedy. He then proceeded to enquire of me who the distrest mother was, and upon hearing that she was Hector's widow, he told me that her husband was a brave man and that when he was a school boy he had read his life at the end of the Dictionary."

One must reluctantly desist from one's pleasant browsing in these old pastures, but a word should be said regarding a change which came over the "Spectator" in the matter of its publication and which is in evidence in these numbers. It is the appearance on it for the first time of the halfpenny newspaper stamp in August, 1712. This impost caused no little commotion among journals of the time, and some of them died under the affliction. Writing on the eve of its adoption, Addison says: "This is the day on which many learned authors will probably publish their last words . . . A sheet of blank paper that must have the new imprimatur clapt upon it before it is qualified to communicate anything to the public will make

its way in the world but very heavily. . . . A facetious friend of mine, who loves a pun, calls this present mortality among authors 'the fall of the leaf.'" Hitherto the "Spectator" was supplied to its readers for a penny, but now the price of two pence begins to appear on it, whereupon come protests from readers, and a paper on the subject by Addison with this quotation prefixed:

What shall it cost? Not much, upon my word.

How much pray—Why Two pence—Two pence, O Lord.

Says the humourist: "I find by several letters which I receive daily that several of my readers would be better pleased to pay three halfpence for my paper than twopence. The ingenious T. W. tells me that I have deprived him of the best part of his breakfast, for that since the rise of my paper he is forced every morning to drink his dish of coffee by itself without the addition of the 'Spectator' that used to be better than lace to it. Eugenius informs me very obligingly that he never thought he should have disliked any passage in my papers, but that of late there have been two words in every one of them that he should heartily wish left out, viz.: 'Price Two-pence.'"

However others might be deterred, the original owner of this volume remained true in his allegiance to the paper, at any rate until the 24th November, 1712, which is the date of the last number included in it. The existence of copies of the "Examiner," "Guardian," and other printed documents bound along with it, may suggest that here his interest in the "Spectator" ceased. The last recorded essay is suggestive. Addison had a little time before killed Sir Roger de Coverley, as some say, to save him from a worse fate at the hands of indiscreet admirers, and here is a letter from Captain Sentry who had inherited the worthy

knight's possessions. The epistle concludes with these words: "A nobleman of Athens made a compliment to Plato the morning after he had supped at his house. 'Your entertainments do not only please when you give them but the day after.'" It would require no very great ingenuity to give a turn to that compliment and apply it truthfully to our dear old friend the "Spectator."





## PETRARCH: THE MAN AND THE POET.

By THOMAS NEWBIGGING.

WE should scarcely deserve the honour attached to membership of the Republic of Letters if we did not, on this the sixth centenary of the birth of Petrarch, join eager hands with our Italian friends in recording our sense of the greatness of their countryman, and in acknowledging the vast services he rendered, not only to the literature of his own country, but also to that of civilised mankind.

It is pleasant to think that Petrarch's instincts lay in the literary direction rather than the political. His was the literary mind tinctured and tempered by philosophy—much less a philosopher, however, than a poet. He aimed at the resuscitation of his country through its literary sense. Though he studied for the law, the profession of his father, he early forsook it for literature. So also with the Church, in which, though he did not take Orders, he is known to have held several minor benefices. Neither law nor theology was attractive enough to his clear mind. These, as taught and practised, were repugnant to his moral sense, in that they both meant repression of the man within him. And it is well that this was so, for, *then* and *there*, there was other and more



important work to be done in another field. As often, or always, happens, the hour and the need produced the man.

His personal appearance, like his mind, was essentially noble and imposing. Unlike his greater countryman, Dante, his heart was not soured by political strife, or embittered by feelings of vengeful hate for wrongs suffered.

A scholar from instinct, he held the Latin classics in the highest estimation, expounding their beauties and their perfection of style. He worked, and travelled and explored his native land and other countries, rescuing from oblivion many of the writings of the great Romans of the classical age; striving to raise the intellect of his countrymen to the standard of its earlier and more glorious time.

Had he done no other than this, his memory would still be held in reverence; but had he done this only, his would not have been the renown which shines as a halo of glory around his name to-day.

It was his work in the vulgar tongue that raised him to the pinnacle on which he stands. The vernacular, as he found it, may be compared to a diamond in the rough, and Petrarch cut it and polished its thousand facets till they reflected the fire and brilliance of his exquisite taste and imagination. Strange to say, he held this part of his life's work in less estimation than his excursions in Latin, though it is the sure basis on which his reputation rests.

Contemporary with Dante, though younger by about forty years, he did more than the elder poet for the revival of letters. True, his imagination had not Dante's vast Homeric range and stateliness, but it appealed to a wider audience; had a subtler and more penetrating quality; it dealt with the kindlier qualities of human nature; it was more genial and winning; it was purified in the alembic of a finer taste, and polished to such a degree

of brilliancy as to reflect both the light and the warm glow of the Italian nature.

Like that of many another poet, love was the stimulus of his lyrical faculty, and by its beneficent action on a mind attuned to the beautiful and the good, he gave a flexibility and strength and sweetness to the Italian tongue which its literature in the centuries that have elapsed since his death has not been able to excel. It has been truly said that "the style of Petrarch, after the lapse of more than five hundred years, is still followed as the most perfect model of writing; and hardly a word in him will be found which is antiquated or obsolete."

I hope I am not laying myself open to the charge of travelling outside my subject, if I remark upon the comparison which is sometimes made between Petrarch and Chaucer, in respect of this perfection, to the disparagement of the latter. Dryden, Berington, and other writers of less note, have inveighed against Chaucer for the alleged obsolescence of his language, and the lack of development it exhibits over the folk-speech of his own era. The charge is frivolous and untrue. It may be admitted that he did not do for English what Petrarch did for Italian—or, more properly, Tuscan. But the special characteristics of the folk-speech in each case must be taken into account before pronouncing judgment. Our English Chaucer was at a disadvantage as compared with Petrarch in the material with which he worked. The Tuscan lent itself to the modelling hand of the Italian poet, whereas the gnarled and knotted angularities of the Saxon English, spiced with Gallicisms, were probably beyond the power of any single master-mason, however deft, (even had the genius been that of Petrarch), to polish into anything like sudden or immediate permanency. English is sometimes claimed, and many think that the claim is not an

unreasonable one, as destined to be the universal language of the future; but however that may be, like its prototype the oak, it has taken a long time to reach its present state of perfection, having required the combined and sustained labours of many generations of scholars and men of genius to enlarge and modify and improve it.

However great Dante was, and no one questions that he was the greater man of the two,—inasmuch as his was a creative mind of the first order into which but few mortals enter,—some of the greatness we discern in him, though still there, would have been less obvious had not Petrarch lived to accomplish his share in the Renaissance. Much more the debt due by posterity to Petrarch. That debt is still being repaid, and it will be long ere the final instalment is made.

The love of Petrarch for his Laura, though necessarily unrequited from the circumstance of her marriage with another, remained with him to the end of his life of seventy years, and was the fruitful theme of all that is best in his exquisite lyrics. These wonderful sonnets of Petrarch plumb the depths of joy and sorrow, of hope and despair, of nature and human nature, of life and death. Petrarch to-day is the Petrarch of the sonnets and the canzoni.

One significant effect of Petrarch's genius as displayed in the revival of a pure literary style, was to banish from Northern Italy the *langue d'oc*, and with it the frivolities of the Troubadours of Provence, which had begun to take root in Italian soil. This Provençal invasion might be compared to a thin gauze covering, (rose-tinted it may be), clouding, without entirely concealing, the beauties of a fine picture, being removed by the sure hand of a skilful renovator.

Viewed from the literary standpoint, it is not too much

to say that of all the great Italian writers, Petrarch is the most beloved by the majority of his countrymen. Dante's fame is "like a star and dwells apart." He compels admiration and homage rather than love and affection.

Of Petrarch's failings we need not speak at length to-day—for, being mortal, he was not devoid of these. We prefer rather to respond to that sentiment of love for the memory of a great writer and poet.

Some of his own countrymen have been his severest censors, going so far as to say that his thirst for fame clouds his reputation as a patriot. But, in trying to form a dispassionate estimate of his character, I cannot endorse that view. The unique individuality of the man must be considered, and the supreme objects of his life, which were constantly before his mind. If he associated or consorted with some of the noble tyrants of his time, it was for the furtherance of his literary aims; and he was courageous enough to frown upon their misdeeds even whilst sharing their hospitality. A lofty and patriotic mind only would have encountered the risks attendant on such a course of conduct in those days.

Though not a politician in the strict sense of that term, he was often employed on high embassies of State chiefly as a peacemaker, for which, by his courage, his learning, and his eloquence, no less than by his lofty character, he was well qualified. In these difficult missions, which required delicate handling, he was almost uniformly successful, where a politician, or even a professional diplomat, might have failed.

The long, affectionate, and unbroken friendship and intercourse between Petrarch and Boccaccio acted as a stimulus to both men in their efforts to excel—the one in poetry, the other in prose; and it was an auspicious event for the advancement of learning that they should have

been contemporaries, friends, and enthusiasts in literary pursuits.

The immediate effect of Petrarch's genius was to give an impulse to the revival of Letters in Europe, which even to-day has not reached its culmination. But it was not in literature alone that the new spirit operated. The arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture began to share in the revived life of the nations, and eventually threw off the mediæval fetters with which they were bound. This was largely due to the influence of Petrarch, who justly deserves to be hailed as the bright star of the Renaissance.

It is with feelings of pride that we entertain the belief that our own Chaucer grasped the hand of, and held conversation with, this celebrated man; linking, so to speak, our English literature with the Italian, and so giving us that strong personal interest in Petrarch, the man and the poet, which we are proud to acknowledge.





POETICAL WORKS OF THOMAS TRAHERNE.

By the Rev. WM. C. HALL.

I.

ABOUT the beginning of 1897 a number of manuscripts which for two hundred years had a precarious existence fell into that greater jeopardy which is occasioned by an inglorious descent to the street bookstall. Fortunately, by the exchange of a few pence they came into the hands of Mr. William T. Brooke, who, after careful examination, adjudged them to be the production of Henry Vaughan. Thereupon he communicated with Dr. Grosart, who confirmed his opinion and undertook, in consequence, to prepare a new and elaborate edition of the works of the Silurist. This scheme, because men are mortal, was not completed. On Dr. Grosart's death in 1899 his library was purchased by Mr. Charles Higham, the bookseller. Mr. Bertram Dobell, having learned from Mr. Brooke the story of the manuscripts, became interested in the matter, and after an examination courteously allowed by Mr. Higham, purchased two of them. A third came into his possession at a sale of part of Dr. Grosart's library at Sotheby's.

Mr. Dobell seems to have arrived very quickly, on the consideration of interval evidence, at the conclusion that

these three manuscripts were not the work of Vaughan, but must have been the production of a hitherto unrecognised religious poet of the seventeenth century. The problem now was, to determine afresh the question of authorship. The assistance of Mr. Brooke was invited. He pointed out that there was appended to an edition of Giles Fletcher's "Christ's Victory and Triumph," which he had edited, a poem entitled "The Ways of Wisdom," a poem very similar in style and spirit to those contained in the manuscripts. This, Mr. Brooke said, he had found in a little book in the British Museum, entitled "A Serious and Pathetical Contemplation of the Mercies of God, in several most Devout and Sublime Thanksgivings for the same," which further contained other pieces in verse. Of these Mr. Dobell desired a copy, which obtaining, it became evident to him that the author of the manuscript poems and of the "Devout and Sublime Thanksgivings" must be one and the same person. Now, in the "Address to the Reader" of the prose piece it is stated, among other matters of biographical interest, that the author was in "the service of Lord Keeper Bridgman as his Chaplain." This clue followed to Wood's "Athenæ Oxonienses" identified the author with Thomas Traherne, who wrote "Roman Forgeries" and "Christian Ethicks." It remained to determine by way of confirmation whether there was evidence to connect either of these works with the author of the manuscripts. This was found in "Christian Ethicks," which contains a poem included also, though in a shorter form and with textual variations, in the manuscript "Centuries of Meditations." So the question of authorship, by means of that Providence which does come to aid the literary investigator sometimes, however capriciously, with its alert presence, was settled.

## II.

Who was Thomas Traherne? It is easier to say what than who: fortunately it is always more important. The answer is one partly for conjecture, and after his chief dates we have to add that most irritating of commonplace adverbs, "probably." The account which careful research furnishes so far is slender, but "probably" sufficiently clear in suggestive outline to be interesting.

Thomas Traherne, the son of a shoemaker, of a family of Welsh descent, probably was born at Hereford in the year 1636. Another suggestion gives Ledbury as his birth-place. The fact cannot be determined, as the parish registers of both places are lost. We have no further record of him before his entrance into Oxford University, although Mr. Dobell ventures on the surmise that he may have had education at Hereford Grammar School. "Athenæ Oxonienses" says he "was entered a Commoner of Brazennose College on the first day of March, 1652, took one degree in Arts, left the House for a time, entered into the sacred function, and in 1661 he was actually created Master of Arts. About that time he became Rector of Credinhill, commonly called Crednell, near to the city of Hereford . . . and in 1669 Bachelor of Divinity." "About that time" is vague; it cannot refer to the year 1661. I imagine—an inference which, if made, might have saved Mr. Dobell from an unnecessary, although small, perplexity—it refers to the time of his actual graduation as a Bachelor. A manuscript of Lambeth Library, quoted by Mr. Dobell, which contains particulars of admissions to benefices *temp.* Commonwealth, has the following entry: "Thomas Traherne, clerk, admitted 30 Dec., 1657, by the Commissioners for the Approbation of Public Preachers to the Rectory of Crednell, alias Creddenhill, Co. Hereford :



patron Amabella, Countess Dowager of Kent." Traherne could not have been more than twenty-one years old at that time, and the suggestion is plausible that he may first have acted as assistant to the minister whom he actually succeeded. He remained at Crednell rather more than nine and a half years. Then he removed to London "to become private chaplain to Sir Orlando Bridgman, who, on August 30, 1667, was created Lord Keeper of the Seals. Lord Bridgman, as he became designated, was deprived of his office in 1672 and went into retirement at Teddington. He took Traherne with him, who seems to have become, apart from his chaplaincy, minister of the parish, "although the post was nominally held by a clerical pluralist of the time." Bridgman died at Teddington on June 25th, 1674. Three months later Traherne died in his patron's house—the exact date is not known—and was buried on October 10th, 1674, in the church at Teddington under the reading-desk. At the time of his death he was probably not more than thirty-eight years of age.

### III.

The poetical works of Thomas Traherne, authenticated, edited, and published for the first time by Mr. Bertram Dobell, to whom lovers of literature must offer their thanks for his painstaking and loving labours, as well as their congratulations on his good fortune, are derived from the three manuscripts we have mentioned and the printed prose volume "Christian Ethicks." They certainly, for the quality of many of them, entitle their author to place and rank with the writers of religious verse of the seventeenth century. There is in the volume to which I urge attention, in spite of much that has an uncertain, obtrusive, or inappropriate form, although rarely in its

material immature conception or commonplace thought, very much that has formal and thematic finish, poetry which is poetry in both its material and its construction. In character it is certainly more "metaphysical"—to use again Dr. Johnson's odious description—than anything to be found in any other writer of the period; left to myself, I should designate it "transcendental." It is the poetry of ecstasy, that which springs from a robust and buoyant religious spirit, assuming its own form, and chanting delights uncreate, for that they are the soul itself. We should not expect it to cover a wide range: it is naturally significant for its intensity, its passion which will not allow many figures of speech, for the reason that it is absorbed with ideas of nature and life which may justly be esteemed fundamental. The ideas of human pre-existence, of the souls primal contact with the world, of natural experience in all its forms as the reflex of a life already complete: such are the subject of this book. They are ideas which ever must form part of the input or output, the very stock-in-trade, of the reflecting and introspective mind. They are always original with every mind that thinks them. They were original with Traherne. But to assume, as Mr. Dobell does, that for these Traherne was the apostolic forerunner of Wordsworth and Berkeley, is unwarranted *ipso facto*. The idea of pre-existence is found in Wordsworth: I warrant you it shall also be suggested in many others, methinks in Shakespeare. Again, we are scientific not for our theories, but for our demonstrations. Save for the syllogism, there were evolutionists before Darwin; they had grasped the conclusion; but Darwin brought the thinkers to school, and gave them caps and gowns wherewith to strut before an apprehensive and alarmed world. Traherne had the touch, the suggestion, the deep-moving intimations of Berkeley's mind; but

it was Berkeley alone who declared in a reasoned system the subjectivity of human knowledge. Mr. Dobell errs, happily as all we do in the love of our friends, in assuming that Traherne, for his meditations and verse, was more than the poet we may acclaim him now to be.

The poems of Traherne considered as a whole, and apart from their incidental teachings, may be said to set forth and work out a theme: (1) Precious childhood's intimations of pre-existence and immortality; (2) The soul's realisation of itself as a unique entity; (3) Its sense of sin as it gazes upon, and comes into contact with the unspiritual elements of the natural world; (4) Its conviction that it must be drawn back to its primal purity and innocence, and (5) Its final recovery, through the offices of religion, of its original spiritual nature and estate.

On the form of these poems I have already ventured a criticism. Let me add that the poet has his favourite expressions and rimes. Of these latter, that of "pleasure" and "treasure" occurs in nearly every poem and upon every other page. It is so constant as to strike with cruel monotony or by its recurrence to jar upon the sensitive ear with an irritating and destructive discord. It is a palpable blemish. Further, in spite of the peculiar verse constructions, or perhaps one should say by reason of them, there is in many of the pieces a dominating suggestion of the characteristics of blank verse; the irregular lines lose their natural assonance, and break away into syllabic measures. But, having said this, one is compelled further to say that there is scarcely a line which, taken by itself, does not contain the elements of true poetic music, while there are stanzas which hold a volume of melody which swells and distends itself for very richness. I regret that I cannot in this paper give a single quotation. I want the book to be bought, and put into that holy niche of the mind where

poets, minor beside other brethren though they be, stand as demi-gods.

## IV.

A word on our prospective good must be added. Mr. Dobell, in his Introduction, promises to publish soon the and ten numbers of a fifth, in verbatim form. I anticipate with a relish, made keen by the extracts Mr. Dobell has afforded, the reading of delicate meditations set forth in delightful and exquisite prose. A gentle spirit which can give fire to the empyrean of song, and yet kindle in the earthly clay of prose the warmth of heavenly altars, commands in this age of material grossness the fealty of our reverence. Let the generations pass: at last we stand in the better presences.





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"The blackbirds are more numerous this year than usual . . . I never miss their loud fluting at night. I suppose they are waiting for my cherries. But what of that? I am content to take sweet music in exchange for stone fruit."—*George Milner: "Country Pleasures."*

A GARDEN such as one discovers  
Only, too oft, in Day-Dream Land,  
Which Art and Nature, wedded lovers,  
For honeymoon delights had planned  
Long ago;  
An up-to-date, old-fashioned Garden!—  
I came upon't, by chance, but late,  
And trespassing in search of pardon  
Pass'd through a little unlatch'd gate  
Swinging fro.

By paths where it was sweet to dally,  
By fragrant bed and mossy shelf  
I went, and in a pleachèd alley  
Came on the Gardener himself  
Unaware,  
As to an Ouzel's sweet outpouring  
He listened, rapt, whilst, as I found,

From old acquaintance still deploring  
The minstrel's morals and his Round  
Didn't square.

But letting him, if he were suited,  
Stay on and pipe without a Stop,  
Although he knew the Rascal fluted  
With visions of a future Crop  
In his eye;  
And that what seemed an honest *parole*  
*D'honneur* to spare each ruddy skin  
Was but a mercenary carol  
For which a Bill would be sent in  
By-and-by!



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